

Module Design Guidance V1.1

1. Who and What is this Guidance for?

- 1.1. This document provides guidance on the design of modules, to supplement the policy within the [institutional framework](#) on programme design. The guidance is aimed at academic staff involved in the design of modules and programmes.
- 1.2. Module design is a process that balances a range of activities with the goal of leading students towards intended learning outcomes.
- 1.3. **Definition of a module:** a module is a self contained, formally structured unit of study, with a coherent and explicit set of aims, learning outcomes and assessment.

2. Module Aims

- 2.1. Each module should have a set of aims. These should describe the broad goals of the module and should succinctly articulate the purpose of the module and what it is trying to achieve.

3. Module Learning Outcomes

- 3.1. Each module should have a set of module learning outcomes (MLOs). These should:
 - succinctly and accurately capture the specific learning that results from engaging with the module and should align with module aims;
 - not be limited to the knowledge gained from the module, but should also capture wider skills developed by engaging with the module;
 - normally contribute towards the development of programme learning outcomes, unless the module is a standalone module.
 - be pitched towards the threshold level of learning (what is required to pass the module), with the purpose of assessment criteria to then ascertain how well outcomes have been achieved.
 - be realistic in number. There is no fixed expectation of how many learning outcomes; a typical module would have between 3 and 6;
 - be written in a way that ensures they are assessable (see section 6, below).
 - be appropriate to the scope of the module and the [credit level](#) of learning at which the module occurs.

4. Module Syllabus / Content

- 4.1. The content of the module should cover everything necessary to enable students to achieve the learning outcomes. This does not necessarily mean that all aspects of every topic need to be delivered in contact points; it is perfectly acceptable that some topics, or parts of topics, should be addressed through guided independent learning. The module content can be broken down into a syllabus: the key topics, concepts and areas of learning that will be addressed within a module.

- 4.2. When developing the module content, it can be useful to consider the activities and the resources that will be deployed to guide students towards successful achievement of the learning outcomes. This places the focus on learning activity rather than solely the delivery of teaching, and helps to align the planning process to the learning outcomes.

5. Staff-Student Contact and Student Work

- 5.1. Careful planning of the contact between staff and students is a key area of module design. As contact points may only represent the minority of total student learning hours on a module, it is important that these are considered carefully in order to optimise student learning. In some ways, staff-student contact can be the foundation that provides students with the tools to engage with effective independent learning until the next contact.
- 5.2. Students will likely spend a significant amount of their learning hours in independent study and work, outside of contact hours. It is important that there is clarity about what independent study may involve for each module to support students to develop effective approaches and study habits.
- 5.3. As such, independent study and contact time should be considered together rather than as separate elements. Independent study could involve preparatory work for contact time (e.g. targeted reading; preparing a presentation); contact points can also be used to guide or clarify independent study tasks.

6. Summative Assessment

- 6.1. Assessment is essential to the student learning experience and will impact engagement with the module and approach to students' studies. Assessment may be both formative and summative.
- 6.2. All summative assessment must be tied to a specific, individual module. At a programme level the range of summative assessment should support progression towards the achievement of programme learning outcomes.
- 6.3. Summative assessment should:
 - allow students to demonstrate how well they have achieved the module learning outcomes;
 - be aligned to the 'delivery' of the module, and be appropriately timed so that students are not being asked to demonstrate something before they have fully engaged with it on the module;
 - be appropriately pitched to the stage of development that can be expected of an average student;
 - comprehensively cover the module learning outcomes. This can be via a single assessment, or alternatively by a combination.
 - be set to realistic deadlines, noting that (if the module is part of a programme) students will likely be undertaking work or assessment for other modules.

- 6.4. Further specific rules on summative assessment are contained in the [institutional framework](#) for programme design and the University's [Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback](#).

7. Formative Work

- 7.1. Students will be learning continuously, and all activities could technically be categorised as formative in that they will inform students about their learning. In some modules, formative assessment may be included to support learning, prior to completion of the summative assessment.
- 7.2. Formative assessment should provide practice in the technique or expectations of the summative assessment, being aligned to the learning involved in the summative assessment and / or the format. It is crucial to ensure that the link between the two is clear, and that there is sufficient time for students to receive and address feedback on any formative assessments prior to the summative assessment.

8. Diagnostic assessment

- 8.1. Modules may also contain diagnostic assessment. This tends to come in advance or at the very start of students beginning a course of learning. It can be useful in establishing commonalities of comprehension within a diverse cohort, to provide insight in terms of the level at which to begin teaching, or to identify key blind spots or misconceptions prior to the start of the teaching. Diagnostic assessment can also be used to identify students who may need additional, extra-curricular support or for students themselves to note areas of possible misunderstanding to which they may wish to pay special attention.

9. Inclusivity

- 9.1. Inclusive learning, teaching and assessment practice is fundamental to providing all students with an equity of opportunity to learn and to demonstrate achievement in their learning. This means intensifying the thought that we give to the design and delivery of curricula. Further guidance and resources on inclusive curriculum design are available via the [Inclusive-Learning@York](#) webpages.

10. Module Evaluation

- 10.1. Effective module design is nearly always iterative. Evaluation is a vital element of design, giving information as to how well the intended learning outcomes have been achieved, how effective module design is in scaffolding student achievement towards these outcomes, and in understanding individual and cohort experiences. Module Evaluation Questionnaires and assessment results provide some insight, but other evaluation techniques (e.g. mid-module evaluation; in-class polling) can help in triangulation and highlighting early any issues. Evaluation is most successful when it is built into the planning process of module design. It may be desirable to add or alter evaluation methods as teaching progresses.

11. Documentation / Links

- 11.1. [Institutional Framework on Programme Design](#)

- 11.2. University of York [Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback](#)
- 11.3. [Guidance on Credit Level Descriptors](#)
- 11.4. [Inclusive Learning resource and toolkits](#)

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